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HAWTHORN AND LAVENDER:

SONGS AND MADRIGALS. PART II.

BY W. E. HENLEY.

XXV.

MOON of half-candied meres
And flurrying, fading snows;
Moon of unkindly rains,
Wild skies, and troubled vanes;
When the norther snarls and bites,
And the old moon walks a-cold,
And the lawns grizzle o' nights,
And wet fogs search the fold:
Here in this heart of mine
A dream that warms like wine,
A dream one other knows,
Moon of the roaring weirs
And the sip-sopping close,
 February Fill-Dyke,
Shapes like a royal rose—
 A red, red rose!

O, but the distance clears!
O, but the daylight grows!
Soon shall the pied wind-flowers
Babble of greening hours,
Primrose and daffodil
Yearn to a fathering sun,
The lark have all his will,
The thrush be never done,
And April, May, and June
Go to the same blythe tune

As this blythe dream of mine!
Moon when the crocus peers,
Moon when the violet blows,
February Fair-Maid,
Haste, and let come the rose—
Let come the rose.

XXVI.

Low—low
Over a perishing after-glow,
A thin, red shred of moon
Trailed. In the windless air
The poplars all ranked lean and chill.
The smell of winter loitered there,
And the year's heart felt still.
Yet not so far away
Seemed the mad Spring,
But that, as lovers will,
I let my laughing heart go play,
As it had been a fond maid's frolicking;
And, turning thrice the gold I'd got,
In the good gloom
Solemnly wished me—what?
What, and with whom?

XXVII.

The night dislimns, and breaks
Like snows slow thawed;
An evil wind awakes
On lea and lawn;
The low east quakes; and hark!
Out of the kindless dark,
A fierce, protesting lark,
High in the horror of dawn!

A shivering streak of light,
A scurry of rain:
Bleak day from bleaker night
Creeps pinched and fain:

The old gloom thins and dies,
 And in the wretched skies
 A new gloom, loth to rise,
 Sprawls, like a thing in pain.

And yet, what matter—say!—
 The shuddering trees,
 The easter-stricken day,
 The sodden leas?
 The good bird, wing and wing
 With time, finds heart to sing,
 As he were hastening
 The swallow o'er the seas.

 XXVIII.

The wind on the wold,
 With sea-scents and sea-dreams attended,
 Is wine!
 The air is as gold
 In elixir—it takes so the splendid
 Sunshine!

O, the larks in the blue!
 How the song of them glitters, and glances,
 And gleams!

The old music sounds new—
 And it's O, the wild Spring, and his chances
 And dreams!

There's a lift in the blood—
 O, this gracious and thirsting and aching
 Unrest!

All life's at the bud,
 And my heart, full of April, is breaking
 My breast.

 XXIX.

This world of gladness,
 Singing and sadness,
 Moves in a madness
 Of youth and mirth;

Above and under
Clothed on with wonder,
Sunrise and thunder,
 And death and birth;
His broods befriending
With grace unending
And gifts transcending
 A god's at play;
Yet do his meetness
And sovran sweetness
 Live in the jocund purpose of May.

So take your pleasure,
And in full measure
Use of your treasure,
 When birds sing best;
For when heaven's bluest,
And earth feels newest,
And love longs truest,
 And takes not rest;
When winds blow cleanest,
And seas roll sheenest,
And lawns lie greenest:
 Then, night and day,
Dear life counts dearest,
And God walks nearest
 To them that praise Him, praising His May.

XXX.

It was a bowl of roses:
 There in the light they lay,
Languishing, glorying, glowing
 Their life away.

And the soul of them rose like a presence,
 Into me crept and grew,
And filled me with something—some one—
 O, was it you?

XXXI.

Sing to me, sing, and sing again,
 My glad, great-throated nightingale:
 Sing, as the good sun through the rain—
 Sing, as the home-wind in the sail!

Sing to me life, and toil, and time,
 O bugle of dawn, O flute of rest!
 Sing, and once more, as in the prime,
 There shall be naught but seems the best.

And sing me at the last of love:
 Sing that old magic of the May,
 That makes the great world laugh and move
 As lightly as our dream to-day!

XXXII.

What doth the blackbird in the boughs
 Sing all day to his nested spouse?
 What but the song of his old mother-Earth,
 In her mighty humour of lust and mirth?
 "Love and God's will go wing and wing,
 And as for death, is there any such thing?"—
 In the shadow of death,
 So, at the nod of the wizard Spring
 The dear bird saith—
 So the bird saith.

Caught with us all in the nets of fate,
 So the sweet wretch sings early and late;
 And, O my fairest, after all,
 The heart of the world's in his innocent call.
 The will of the world's with him wing and wing:—
 "Life—life—life! 'Tis the sole great thing
 This side of death,
 Heart on heart in the wonder of Spring!"
 So the bird saith—
 The wise bird saith!

XXXIII.

(FROM THE SPANISH.)

*Come where my lady lies,
Sleeping down the golden hours!
Cover her with flowers.*

Bluebells from the clearings,
Flag-flowers from the rills,
Wildings from the lush hedgerows,
Delicate daffodils,
Sweetlings from the formal plots,
Blossoms from the bowers—
Heap them round her where she sleeps,
Cover her with flowers!

Sweet-pea and pansy,
Red hawthorn and white;
Gilliflowers—like praising souls;
Lilies—lamps of light:
Nurselings of what happy winds,
Suns, and stars, and showers!
Joylets good to see and smell—
Cover her with flowers!

Like to sky-born shadows
Mirrored on a stream,
Let their odours meet and mix
And waver through her dream!
Last, the crowded sweetness
Slumber overpowers,
And she feels the lips she loves
Craving through the flowers.

XXXIV.

There was no kiss that day?
No intimate Yea-and-Nay,
No sweets in hand, no tender, lingering touch?
None of those darling, desperate caresses,

So instant—O, so brief!—and yet so much,
The thought of the swiftest lifts and blesses?
Nor any one of those great royal words,
Those sovran privacies of speech,
Frank as the call of April birds,
That, whispered, live a life of gold
Among the heart's high memories,
And irk, and thrill, and ravish, and beseech,
Even when the dream of dreams in death's a-cold?
No, there were none of these,
Dear one, and yet——
O eyes on eyes! O voices breaking still,
For all the watchful will,
Into a kinder kindness than seemed due
From you to me, and me to you!
And that hot-eyed, close-throated, blind regret
Of woman and man baulked and debarred the blue!—
No kiss—no kiss that day?
Nay, rather, though we seemed to wear the rue,
Sweet friend, how many, and how goodly—say!

XXXV.

Between the dusk of a summer night
And the dawn of a summer day,
We caught at a mood as it passed in flight,
And we bade it stoop and stay.
And what with the dawn of night began
With the dusk of day was done;
For that is the way of woman and man,
When a hazard has made them one.

'Arc upon arc, from shade to shine,
The world went thundering free;
And what was his errand but hers and mine—
The lords of him, I and she?
O, it's die we must, but it's live we can,
And the marvel of earth and sun
Is all for the joy of woman and man
And the longing that makes them one.

XXXVI.

'Twas in a world of living leaves
That we two reaped and bound our sheaves.
They were of white roses and red,
And in the scything they were dead.

Now the high Autumn flames afield,
And what is all his golden yield
To that we took, and sheaved, and bound
In the green dusk that whispered round?

Yet must the memory grieve and ache
Of that we did for dear love's sake,
But may no more under the sun,
Being, like our summer, spent and done.

XXXVII.

These were the woods of wonder
We found so close and boon,
When the bride-month in her beauty
Lay mouth to mouth with June.

November, the old, lean widow,
Sniffs, and snivels, and shrills,
And the bowers are all dismantled,
And the long grass wets and chills;

And I hate these dismal dawns,
These miserable even-ends,
These orts, and rags, and heeltaps—
This dream of being merely friends.

XXXVIII.

Dear hands, so many times so much
When the spent year was green and prime,
Come, take your fill, and touch
This one poor time.

Dear lips, that could not leave unsaid
One sweet-souled syllable of delight,
Once more—and be as dead
In the dead night.

Dear eyes, so proud to read in mine
The message of our counted years,
Look your proud last, nor shine,
Dear eyes, through tears.

XXXIX.

The rain and the wind, the wind and the rain—
They are with us like a disease :
They worry the heart, they work the brain,
As they shoulder and clutch at the shrieking pane,
And savage the helpless trees.

What does it profit a man to know
These tattered and tumbling skies
A million stately stars will show,
And the ruining grace of the after-glow,
And the rush of the wild sunrise?

Ever the rain—the rain and the wind !
Come, hunch with me over the fire,
Dream of the dreams that leered and grinned,
Ere the blood of the Year fell soured and thinned,
And the death came on desire.

XL.

O, these long nights of days !
All the year's baseness in the ways,
All the year's wretchedness in the skies ;
While on the blind, disheartened sea
A tramp-wind plies
Cringingly and dejectedly !
And rain and darkness, mist and mud,
They cling, they close, they sneak into the blood,
They crawl and crowd upon the brain :
Till in a dull, dense monotone of pain
The past is found a kind of maze,
At whose every coign and crook,
Broad angle and privy nook,
There waits a hooded Memory,
Sad, yet with kind, strange, unrepublishing eyes.

XLI.

“Dearest, when I am dead,
 Make one last song for me:
 Sing what I would have said—
 Righting life’s wrong for me.

Tell them how, early and late,
 Glad ran the days with me,
 Seeing how goodly and great,
 Love, were your ways with me.”

XLII.

*He made this gracious earth a hell
 With love and drink. I cannot tell
 Of which he died. But death was well.*

Will I die of drink?
 Why not?
 Won’t I pause and think?
 —What?
 Why in seeming wise
 Waste your breath?
 Everybody dies—
 Dies of death!

Youth—if you find it’s youth
 Too late?
 Truth—and the back of truth?
 Straight,
 Be it love or liquor,
 What’s the odds,
 So it slide you quicker
 To the gods?

XLIII.

Grey hills, grey skies, grey lights,
 And still, grey sea—
 O fond, O fair,

The Mays that were,
When the wild days and wilder nights
Made it like heaven to be!

Grey head, grey heart, grey dreams—
O, breath by breath,
Night-tide and day
Lapse gentle and grey,
As to a murmur of tired streams,
Into the haze of death.

XLIV.

So let me hence as one
Whose part in the world has been dreamed out and done:
One that hath fairly earned and spent,
In pride of heart and jubilation of blood,
Such wages, be they counted bad or good,
As Time, the old taskmaster, was moved to pay;
And, having warred and suffered, and passed on
Those gifts the Arbiters preferred and gave,
.Fare, grateful and content,
Down the dim way,
Whereby races innumerable have gone,
Into the silent universe of the grave.

Grateful for what hath been—
For what my hand hath done, mine eyes have seen,
My heart been privileged to know;
With all my lips in love have brought
To lips that yearned in love to them, and wrought
In the way of wrath, and pity, and sport, and song:
Content, this miracle of being alive
Dwindling, that I, thrice weary of worst and best,
May shed my duds, and go
From right and wrong,
And, ceasing to regret, and long, and strive,
Accept the past, and be for ever at rest.

W. E. HENLEY.